Chris Cree Brown
Stephen Eastaugh
Peter Fitzpatrick
Sue Lovegrove
David Stephenson

looking south

forward

Antarctica exists between present day reality and the romantic theatre of nineteenth century adventure and exploration, revealing feats of extraordinary human capacity for survival and endurance. A place at the symbolic edge between the known and unknown world; a strange and bizarre landscape of exquisite beauty that is both powerful and hostile in it's vastness.

This exhibition features the work of a small group of artists who are investigating, and perhaps challenging, preconceived ideas of what the phenomenon of Antarctica means as well as considering ways of representing their own relationship to place.

The Plimsoll Gallery Committee of the University of Tasmania is committed to presenting a major exhibition in conjunction with the Ten Days on the Island Festival. These exhibitions have each focused on aspects of *Landscape*, and explore and develop

paul zika

research undertaken within the Tasmanian School of Art in three of the University's Theme Research Areas - Natural Environment/ Wilderness, Antarctic/Southern Oceans, and Community/Place and Change. This exhibition for 2005 follows on from the two highly successful and critically acclaimed exhibitions "between Phenomena - The Panorama and Tasmania" (2001) curated by Raymond Arnold and "Painting Tasmanian Landscape" (2003) curated by Paul Zika.

This curatorial project has emerged through regular conversations with Sue Lovegrove over the last year, and her insight and excitement for the region is a subtext to this exhibition.

antarctica: fantasy and reality

Antarctica may be visited by sea, by air, or in the imagination. The cold, white continent lures seductively like the Sirens of the *Odyssey* and generates in its curious visitors a passion and obsession like no other destination. It is an enigmatic land of contrasts where life and death, awesome beauty, and extreme danger simultaneously co-exist: a land of fluctuating shape and size where reality and fantasy are intertwined, things are not always what they seem, and fact is stranger than fiction.

Scale and distance are deceptive in this white land often blurred by blizzards, but also suffused by rich, unexpected colours. The senses are stimulated by its sights—'sculpted' bergs, fluted ice cliffs, seas of pancake ice; its sounds—howling wind, treacherous crackling and crunching ice, squawking, screeching or porpoising penguins; its smells—the pungent aroma of sub-Antarctic plants. All inspire creative responses from visual artists, writers and

composers in a domain that has been largely that of the scientist.

Maps were the first images of Antarctica—not drawn from observation as the continent had yet to be discovered—but created from the mathematical calculations and philosophic rationale of the ancient Greeks. These ideas later influenced the cartographer Ptolemy. One of his maps *circa* 160 AD and published in the 15th century, is richly coloured in gold and embellished with little puffing heads symbolising the winds of the world. The vast southern land named *Terra incognita* sprawls across the base of the globe and is linked to Africa —a fascinating combination of the known and the imagined.

Antarctica was eventually identified as a continent separate from Africa, South America and Australia. Some scholars had imagined it to be a frozen sea like the North Pole but it is actually the opposite: a continent surrounded by sea. Early maps fire the imagination with their imaginative, sometimes bizarre decorations of medieval monsters, fabulous peoples, mountains, birds and classically robed figures with penguins. There are dubious recordings of Antarctic coastline and mysterious islands, while others show honest gaps where knowledge is incomplete. They are as artistic as they are informative.

Humans have been drawn to the south seeking pure adventure, new knowledge, commercial, political and territorial gain. Influenced by the Enlightenment, artist-illustrators of the 18th and 19th centuries observed and recorded many new, sometimes quite astonishing species in drawings and watercolours. The accuracy of the final images published in voyage reports however, depended entirely upon the skills and interpretation of the originals by the engravers or lithographers. New species were not always easy to identify. James

Weddell's *Sea Leopard of the South Orkneys* is not a leopard seal, as closer observation of its markings reveals; Weddell had discovered a new species that is now named after him. Joseph Dalton Hooker discovered exotic mega-flora in the sub-Antarctic and his illustrations were exquisitely reproduced in his book *Flora Antarctica*. One such example is of the tall, aromatic, pink or purple *Anisotome latifolia*.

Fact and fantasy are intertwined in some strangely descriptive historical images. John Edward Davis—second master of *Terror* (1839–43), cartographer and amateur artist—truthfully recorded Antarctic New Year celebrations in a carved ice ballroom, the men unbelievably dressed in formal brass-buttoned uniforms, top hats and coats, exactly the same as they would be for these celebrations at 'home', but they are on a remote ice floe far away from Edwardian England. And there is the egotistical statement of Borchgrevink who, in 1895, painted a watercolour of himself stepping first out of the boat at Victoria Land to prove that he was the first to land on mainland Antarctica. Two others made this claim and the bizarre story captured the imagination of Jan Senbergs who, in 1987-88, painted a delightful postmodernist spoof of the claimed event: a modern scene of the artist stepping out of the boat, his absolutely huge boot 'putting his foot in it'.

Artists have depicted fantastic, surreal, natural phenomena which inspired a spiritual response in the 19th century and still, today, evoke a sense of awe and wonder. George Forster, on Captain Cook's second voyage (1772–75), *painted Ice islands with ice-blink* from observation, imbuing it with an aura of romance. The eerie, whitish-yellow light of the ice-blink on the horizon is light reflected upwards from the ice, indicating ice areas beyond the viewer's vision. And the colourful, glowing, dancing lights

of auroras have inspired works of art such as Edward Wilson's *Auroral Corona* in the early 20th century, depicting two figures on an icy slope illuminated by a spectacular crown and shaft of light.

In 1876 Gustave Doré illustrated Coleridge's epic poem *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, believed by Bernard Smith to be influenced by the scientific observations of astronomer William Wales on Captain Cook's Antarctic voyage. It is an intriguing blend of scientific fact and romantic imagination. Doré's eerie image of the ice-covered ship surrounded by icy cliffs and surmounted by a lunar halo with hovering white bird is an icon of Antarctic imagery. Further exploring the world of imagination are George Marston's illustrations in the book *Aurora Australis* (1908–09). His stirring, fulminatious image shows small figures *At the Edge of the Crater* and immortalises the true event of the first ascent of Mt. Erebus even though he did not actually experience the climb himself. He also made a lively, imaginative etching of a figure tossed high in the air by an exploding mushroom for Mawson's mythical story of *Bathybia*, a fantastical tropical land beneath the South Pole.

The invention of the camera in the mid-19th century led to a peak of photographic achievement in the Heroic Era of the early 20th century. Photographs provide truthful records but they can also be manipulated to reveal a different or greater truth. HG Ponting's portraits are artificially—but skilfully and precisely—staged for information and artistic effect; Frank Hurley's images are creatively collaged or re-arranged in his fake combination prints. So, while Hurley's romantic icescapes may be scientifically unreliable they engage the imagination and rank as some of the finest Antarctic landscapes ever produced. Perhaps the only questionable 'fiddling was, as writer Caroline Alexander suggests, his cutting out of the

ship *James Caird* from *The Departure* image, turning it into *The Rescue* to provide a more suitable end to his story of *The Endurance.*

Ice formations in Antarctica are fantastic and varied—predictable and unpredictable. One of Ponting's photographs captures a sea covered by flat pancake ice and another captures the crinkly texture of a disintegrating iceberg with mirror-clear reflections on a calm day. In his *Ice Cave* images he places the viewer in a womb-like cave, inside an iceberg, looking through its narrow opening fringed with icicles. And Frank Hurley's photograph of a gigantic mushroom iceberg in the Mackellar Islets—its 'suspended' form of sea-eroded ice upon a rock—defies belief. In the late 20th century Christian Clare Robertson meticulously painted an intriguing three-dimensional jigsaw of cracks in the translucent frozen ice of *Twelve Lake* and David Stephenson photographed flat jigsaw shards of pack ice breaking up in *Ice Pattern in Prydz Bay, Antarctica.* The paintings of Caroline Durré—icy landscapes overlaid with evidence of technology such as scientific printouts and linked by allegorical figures—emphasise the paradox and co-existence of the pristine wilderness with our use of science and technology.

There is the phenomenon of the evolution of the ice itself—the anomaly of this solid/ephemeral substance. A glacier is formed from water, traps grit and boulders, and in its rock-hard state, moves slowly down the mountain to calve into the sea, break up and dissolve into nothingness. Jörg Schmeisser, whose Antarctic work is an intriguing mix of intellectual discipline and sensuous fantasy, traced the life of an iceberg in the exquisitely etched series *Big Changes* (2002–3).

Thus Antarctica lures artists with a sense of adventure, and

curiosity—aesthetic, intellectual or spiritual. Artists—from their sense of heightened awareness—express their thoughts, feelings and challenging concepts to other Antarcticans and to an eager, waiting armchair audience. Reality is enhanced by fantasy, emphasising the unique qualities of this particular place and celebrating the intrepid, sometimes eccentric exploits of humans who venture there to inhabit the fringes of this cold, vast wilderness.

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literature looks south

For the last fifty years Antarctica has been labelled the 'continent for science': a place to be studied objectively, to be known and understood in the precise, unambiguous languages of geology, glaciology, physics, zoology and biology. The Antarctic region, however, has meanings for human beings that cannot be conveyed in these languages alone. Antarctica is layered over not only by several kilometres of ice, but also by accumulating strata of myth, metaphor and narrative.

Ironically, one story that is often told about Antarctica is that it brings writers (as well as explorers) to their knees: its landscape is too extreme, too empty, too unearthly to find adequate representation; it exceeds our metaphors, our very language. But what place does not, in some sense, beggar description? Oceans, deserts, high mountain ranges and outer space all share aspects of Antarctica's 'unwritable' qualities, but have compelled rather than repelled storytellers. It is no surprise, then, that over several centuries a diverse group of writers have slowly generated a literary vocabulary – a set of genres, themes, motifs and metaphors – with which to 'write' Antarctica.

The best known Antarctic stories are those that relate the actual experiences of early explorers: Douglas Mawson stumbling into base at the end of a disaster-ridden trek, starving and exhausted, only to see his expedition's relief ship sailing out of the bay; the ice slowly crushing Ernest Shackleton's ship, the *Endurance*; and the attempt on the pole by Robert F. Scott and his four companions, with its terrible disappointments. These are stories of events that 'really happened,' although each generation tells them differently: Scott's story in particular has continually metamorphosed, from an initial tale of heroic self-sacrifice, to a lesson in mismanagement and foolish amateurism, to a more complex narrative in which luck (or the lack of it) plays a significant role. 'Scott's Last Expedition' has been mythologized, and the shape of the myth tells us as much about ourselves and our own views of Antarctica as it does about Scott and his men.

Less famous than these exploration narratives but no less fascinating are the imaginative responses to Antarctica produced over the last three centuries by novelists, playwrights and poets. Antarctica has attracted more than its fair share of hacks, but

alongside these are a number of well-known names: Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Edgar Allan Poe, James Fenimore Cooper, Jules Verne, H. P. Lovecraft, Vladimir Nabokov, Douglas Stewart, Thomas Keneally, Les Murray, Dorothy Porter, Ursula Le Guin, Beryl Bainbridge, Bill Manhire and Kim Stanley Robinson have all been drawn, artistically and in some cases physically, to the continent.

Until recently, creative writers who chose to 'look south' were faced with the task of describing and interpreting a place they had never seen. This was both limiting and liberating: attempts at realism were inevitably second-hand and derivative, reliant as they were on the accounts of explorers, whalers and sealers; but speculation was given free rein. The Antarctic continent in literature has abounded in creatures and phenomena that appear wonderful, terrible and ridiculous by turns: polar spirits; demon ships; routes to Mars; enormous polar whirlpools; alien creatures buried in ice; dinosaurs; giant lobsters; giant insects; and giant albino kangaroos. Increasingly, in the twentieth century, these speculations have been joined by more sober offerings. A number of creative writers have provided their own interpretations of the events of the Heroic Era, re-telling the famous stories of Scott, Shackleton and Mawson from new perspectives. The last few decades, when writers have been able to travel south as tourists or official interpreters, have seen the rise of comparatively realistic novels set in icebreakers or scientific stations. However, on the whole more speculative genres – techno-thrillers, utopias, science fiction and horror – continue to dominate fiction set in Antarctica.

It is impossible to identify any one dominant story that we tell about the continent. It is, however, possible to trace some broad themes around which Antarctic stories cluster:

horror In this group of stories Antarctica is metaphorically as well as literally the underside of the world: a weird, hellish region that produces monsters and lures unsuspecting sailors and explorers to unspeakable fates. Antarctica acts as the world's subconscious, harbouring our deepest fears. This is the Antarctica of Coleridge's ancient mariner, sailing a zombie-crewed ship with a decaying albatross hung around his neck; of Poe's Arthur Gordon Pym, left teetering on the brink of a terrifying south polar cataract; of John W. Campbell's Thing, a shape-shifting, body-snatching alien that terrorizes a scientific station. This is the Antarctica that swallows explorers in its unfathomably deep crevasses; the Antarctica that still harbours in its layers the dead bodies of Scott and his companions; the unstable Antarctica whose ice sheets would devastate the world if they were to collapse.

hope Alongside this horror runs a contrary notion of Antarctica as a site of hope: the one last uncorrupted wilderness; a chance for humanity to start afresh, to experiment with new ideas. Here Antarctica's location on the world's underside signals not hell but a place where established conventions can be overturned. Even after Cook's circumnavigation of the continent in the 1770s showed the region to be hostile and icy, utopian novelists wrote of a hidden, temperate continent harbouring lost civilizations that put the rest of the world to shame. While the utopian Antarctica reached its peak in the nineteenth century, before land exploration of the continent had begun, its legacy is still strong today in novels such as Kim Stanley Robinson's *Antarctica*. As Robinson points out, the Antarctic Treaty itself, with its calls for international cooperation, demilitarization and suspension of territorial claims, is a utopian document.

transformation One of the strongest impulses in writing about Antarctica is desire to show the journey south as a transforming one. "Antarctica makes a different dimension altogether…" observes a scientist in Rosie Thomas's recent novel *Sun at Midnight:* "Always, for ever, you see everything in your life through its prism." This Antarctica is a state of mind, a space of inner as much as outer exploration. While the metaphor of the physical journey parallelling a journey of self-discovery occurs in much travel writing, in Antarctic stories it is the experience of the place, rather than the journey, that transforms. This transformation can be both physical and psychological: Campbell's scientists are literally transformed into alien beings; Thomas's protagonist similarly changes physical shape during her months in Antarctica (she discovers that she is pregnant), but also gains a new self-assurance and sense of identity in the process. Antarctica, after all, is a place of transformation in a very literal sense: doubling in size from winter to summer, constantly moving, cracking, melting and refreezing, it is itself a kind of shape-shifter.

preservation Paradoxically, just as powerful as the idea that Antarctica changes those who go there is the sense that, in Antarctica, things do not change. Historic huts, old biscuits, rubbish tips, and explorers' dead bodies are all preserved by the extreme cold. This, along with the unfamiliar diurnal rhythms of high latitudes, gives the sense that time progresses differently in Antarctica; historical events seem closer, even present. Stories in which characters are 'frozen in time' are common in Antarctic literature, from the nineteenth-century report of the Jenny, a ship drifting for decades around Antarctic waters, her captain and crew snap-frozen in place, to Brenda Clough's recent science fiction story "May Be Some Time," in which Captain Oates walks out of his tent into the far future. This same sense of preservation

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both motivates and complicates current attempts to protect Antarctica, to leave the icescape untouched.

These are only four of the many kinds of stories that Antarctica has generated; through them we can better understand our attitudes towards the 'continent for science.' For while there is a bedrock underneath the kilometres of continental ice, there is no one solid unchanging meaning that Antarctica holds under its layers of narrative: its meaning for humans is embedded in the stories we tell about it.

historic works

David Eastman 1947
Establishment of ANARE Station at Heard Island
black and white photograph 74 x 101 cm
< (detail)

Tannat William Edgeworth-David 1909
The First at the South Magnetic Pole
photograph 27 x 34 cm

Photographer unknown 1912
Taking possession of Queen Mary Land at Possession Rocks
photograph 27 x 34 cm

Frank Hurley 1912
Erecting a wireless mast at Commonwealth Bay with Mawson's Hut in the background
photograph 27 x 34 cm

Frank Hurley 1912
Mawson's Hut at Commonwealth Bay under construction
photograph 27 x 34 cm

The South Polar Regions to illustrate the paper by Staff Commander J. E. Davis
Map published for the Journal of the Royal Geographical Society by J. Murray, London 1869
27 x 27 cm

South Polar Regions with the Antarctic Continent drawn to illustrate the probable topography as deduced from present available data by D. Mawson
Map published in the Geographical Journal 1911
34 x 37 cm

all courtesy Australian Antarctic Division

the artists

chris cree brown: a composer in antarctica

Before leaving New Zealand, I classified the sounds of Antarctic into four different categories:
environmental sounds: ice cracking, breaking and rumbling on the Erebus ice tongue, tapping ice crystals, ice crystals shattering, and the various types of wind (Polar wind, Antarctic white out, Katabatic wind)
wildlife: various species of Penguin, Skuas, Petrels and the underwater vocalisations of seals
human activity: the effort in walking (panting), the squeaking of footprints on snow (the snow in New Zealand is not dry enough for this sound), ice breakers and the radio communications

silence.

One of the most striking aspects of the Antarctic sound world is the paucity of sound. If, over a period of time, all sound were drawn on a map of Antarctica, the vast majority of markings would be the sound of wind. Exclude the sound of wind, and the map would become virtually blank. There would be a small dot representing an Adelie penguin rookery here and a small pinprick representing a Skua call there and, if in summer, perhaps a solid line between McMurdo and the centre of the map depicting a flight to the pole. Hundreds of thousands of square miles would remain totally unmarked. Indeed, the greater preponderance of sound sources (other than wind) in Antarctica would be of human origin. There were two occasions when noise prevented me from making recordings. A Hercules aircraft, at some distance hindered me from recording the snorts and bellows of a Weddell seal snoozing in the pallid sun. The second time was at Lake Vanda where a scientist was pumping water with a diesel engine (again at some distance), preventing any recording. These exceptions, however, accentuated the ubiquitous silence.

The Antarctic Treaty acknowledges sound ecology and has set aside some few thousand square miles where mechanical and other human noise is prohibited. Ours is a world where noise (defined here as the undesirable sonic byproduct of human activity) and its insidious psychological consequences on humanity has largely been ignored. As the Canadian sound ecologist, R. Murray Schafer wrote in his book, *The Soundscape - Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World*, "It would seem that noise pollution has reached an apex of vulgarity in our time..."

Antarctica, by contrast, appears as a near pristine environment, not only with regard to its visual and physical environment, but also in its sonic landscape. The tranquility in Antarctica is unfamiliar and as

a consequence, marginally disturbing, especially when exacerbated by the absence of ambient sound. The sociological, psychological and cultural changes that have occurred as a direct consequence of the unrestrained increase in, and excessive intensity of, noise pollution must be profound. However, it is reassuring that our species has saved some small piece of the planet in terms of sound ecology, even if there is nothing there except ice.

There is little doubt that when tourism in Antarctica becomes further established, a corresponding increase in noise will ensue and, as elsewhere on the planet, assume a low priority in the pollution stakes.

A further striking aspect of the Antarctic sound world is the apparent incongruity of many sounds when compared to the environment. The massive, majestic icescapes and graceful, sweeping glaciers evoke a music that embodies grand, slow-moving, dense and interweaving textures. These characteristics seem to be the antithesis of the sounds that are heard on the continent. The sound of an Adelie penguin rookery is a babbling of squabbling jesters, and the sound of mukluks trudging on snow is like insects walking over one's eardrum. The Weddell seals make sounds that could be confused with sounds from the thirty-year old AKS synthesizer, and even the differing types of winds are often too unsettling to be closely associated with the land and ice forms they embrace.

Perhaps only the Skua with it's long plaintive cry finds any sonic analogy to the landscape.

Antarctica is a very different place; almost like another planet. It is beautiful, quiet, majestic, exquisite, graceful, orderly, and yet

simultaneously dangerous, deafening, menacing, violent, harsh and aberrant.

My Antarctic experience is one of the most significant and important experiences of my life. The various moods, expansive grandeur and majestic icescapes have left a deep and enduring impression, not only on me, but also my work.

In November 1999, Chris Cree Brown was selected to travel to Antarctica with the *Artists to Antarctica* programme run under the auspices of Antarctica New Zealand.

The artist wishes to thank Antarctica New Zealand and Creative New Zealand for their visionary programme that enabled him to experience the magic of Antarctica

under erebus 2000
compact disc recording
14 min. 45 sec duration

www.music.canterbury.ac.nz/CCBrownlink/chrispers.htm

stephen eastaugh

I have been travelling for over two decades so home has become a difficult concept for me. After visiting 70 countries and rarely staying still for longer than 3 months I have become rather nomadic. Antarctica has never been a home for humans and due to this fact I felt strangely comfortable there.

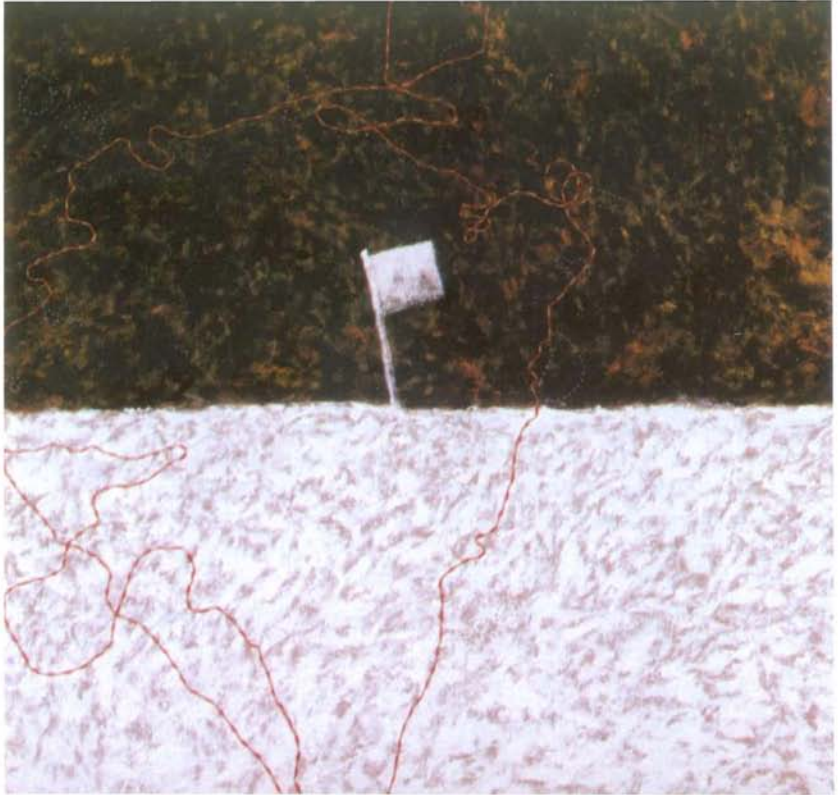
During my last trip to the Antarctic I was busy with a series of paintings called *Unmapping*. Unlike cartography, which is concerned with location, law, topography and information, I concerned myself with dislocation, imagined space and mystery. Elements of maps from the heroic exploration days are utilized in some works, as is the grid or a pattern based on longitude and latitude. Over the years art and maps have enabled me to explore the fuzzy borders of geography and mind. I have found myself many times in foreign lands hopelessly trying to refold enormous maps back to their original pocket size.

Over the summer of 2002/3 in the Davis station heli-hut I painted and contemplated how to refold or express the tricky mysteries of Antarctica via art. I often hand stitched my way across the linen rather than painting a line as this to me felt like I was trudging across the picture plain. Duplicating the feeling of walking over the icecap.

In this science-driven village I also endeavoured to find out if Antarctica was really profound or was it just cold and boring? I looked for the sublime but I found a sort of sexy danger that reminded me of my mortality. Perhaps that was the sublime?

As I write this I am on my way to Patagonia where I will board a ship that takes me back to Antarctica. I will have more of a chance to find those elusive sublime bits and to see more of this white continent that is so beautiful you can die for it.

Stephen Eastaugh wishes to thank the Australian Antarctic Division for their support.



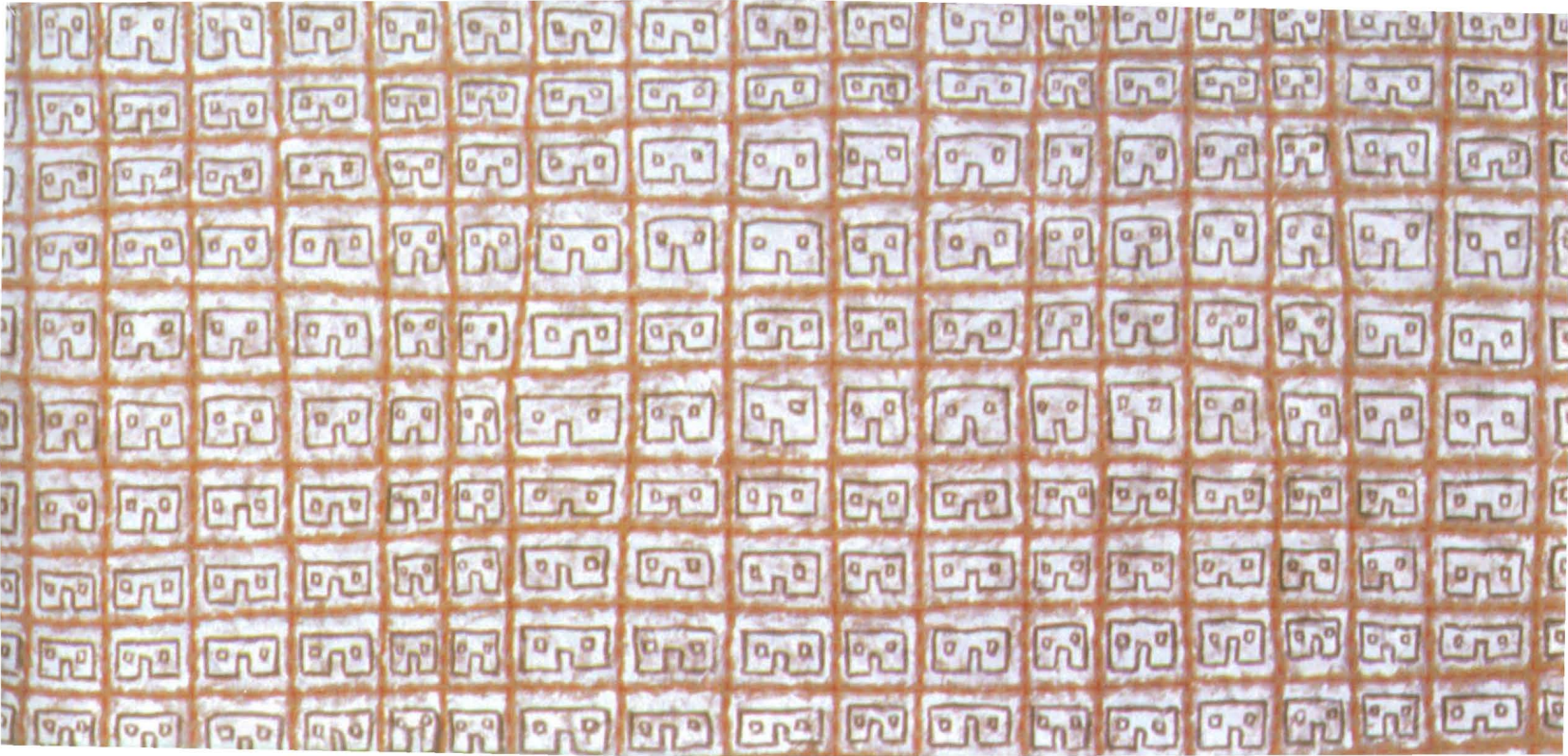
Berg Farm 2003
White Flag (James Cook) 2003 <
No One Home / Dongas 2003
(detail) >
Location, Location, Location (Ernest Shackleton) 2003

all works acrylic and ink on linen, cotton thread
each 150 x 150 cm

courtesy William Mora Galleries, Melbourne

the artist is represented in Australia
by William Mora Galleries, Melbourne

www.stepheneastaugh.com.au



peter fitzpatrick

" Just a tiny note to be taken back by the dogs. Things are not so rosy as they might be, but we keep our spirits up and say the luck must turn. So far every turn shows the extraordinary good fortune that Shackelton had. This is only to tell you that I can keep up with the rest as well as of old, and that I think of you whenever I stretch tired limbs in a very comfortable sleeping-bag C.
P.S. The thought of you is very pleasant".
Captain Robert Falcon Scott 10 December 1911

Captain Robert Falcon Scott's return from the South Pole was stalled by what was believed to be a freak blizzard on 21st March 1912 at Latitude 79° 50 Minutes South. Captain Scott and two of his companions spent several days in their "Tent of Death", 11 miles away from One Ton Depot the largest supply point on his expedition's journey. Their bodies, diaries, geological samples and exposed photographic plates where found by a search party in November 1912.

Captain Scott and his four companions deliver a vivid picture of Antarctic exploration in the early 1900's - albeit a British perspective. The expedition was meant to be Britain's finest hour of the Edwardian era; Captain Scott bequeathed his beloved nation the supreme example of human sacrifice in pursuit of honour. Whether in favour or critical of Captain Scott, the British Antarctic Expedition of 1910 — 1913 is the paramount Antarctic journey for the intrepid armchair explorer. Indeed the story is so well documented through the journals, letters and artifacts of the five men that several of its readers have been moved to retrace his steps while draped in gortex.

After walking 800 miles to obtain their goal, only to be beaten by Norwegian Roald Amundsen a month before, the team setup a camera with string attached to the shutter and proceeded to take a series of self portraits. It was these images that began my association with Captain Scott and his men. Over the years the journey has taken me to many places and allowed me to meet numerous people who have made their way South. The common aspect of both the contemporary and past Antarctic explorer is the eyes, it's as if their retinas have been burnt by the ultimate visual experience.

Latitude 79 Degrees 50 Minutes South 11 Miles 1996 — 2005

Oates, Scott, Wilson, Bowers, At the Pole, Evans (detail) >
Tent of Death <
all works pigment ink on canvas, each 125 x 125 cm

Black Flag #1, Black Flag #2, Black Flag #3, Black Flag #4, Black Flag #5
all works c-type print on aluminium, each 15 x 15 cm

courtesy the artist

cabinet of rare artifacts with map items on loan from the Port Chalmers Regional Maritime Museum, New Zealand

www.latitude79.com

sue lovegrove: vanishing

In February 2004 I had the opportunity to travel aboard the RSV Aurora Australis, to the Antarctic continent. I was looking for an experience of a minimal white landscape, to find out what it was really like to be completely surrounded by and lose oneself in the empty whiteness of air and ice. There were moments when I sensed this emptiness, but the part of the trip that I responded to most was the three to four day period on the ship between crossing the Antarctic convergence, (the mobile interface where the cold Antarctic seas meet and mix with the warmer Pacific, Atlantic and Indian oceans) and arriving at the dense pack ice of

the Petersen Bank near Casey. It is a zone that is in a constant state of transformation, half the year it is frozen solid while the rest of the time it fluctuates between various stages of freezing, cracking, melting and refreezing. As the temperature begins to drop the ocean is flecked with patches of newly forming ice – circles of pancake ice and *nilas*, thin sheets of ice, which break and repeatedly refreeze creating a fractured film of ice fingers across the surface.

The eerie light, called ice blink — a phenomenon of light reflecting off the surface of the ice illuminating the horizon and icebergs glowing white in the distance like lost jewels — creates a strange and bizarre landscape which is hard to comprehend. It appeared to me as a fragile and delicate environment quite contrary to the commonly held perceptions of the dramatic and monumental landscape documented by explorers. There is a profound stillness in the ice, a cold so intense as to seemingly halt all motion.

In my paintings I have tried to recreate the elusive and transient phenomena of the sea ice, the endless cycle of melting, cracking and refreezing, combined with a personal desire for a symbolic return to an immense whiteness.

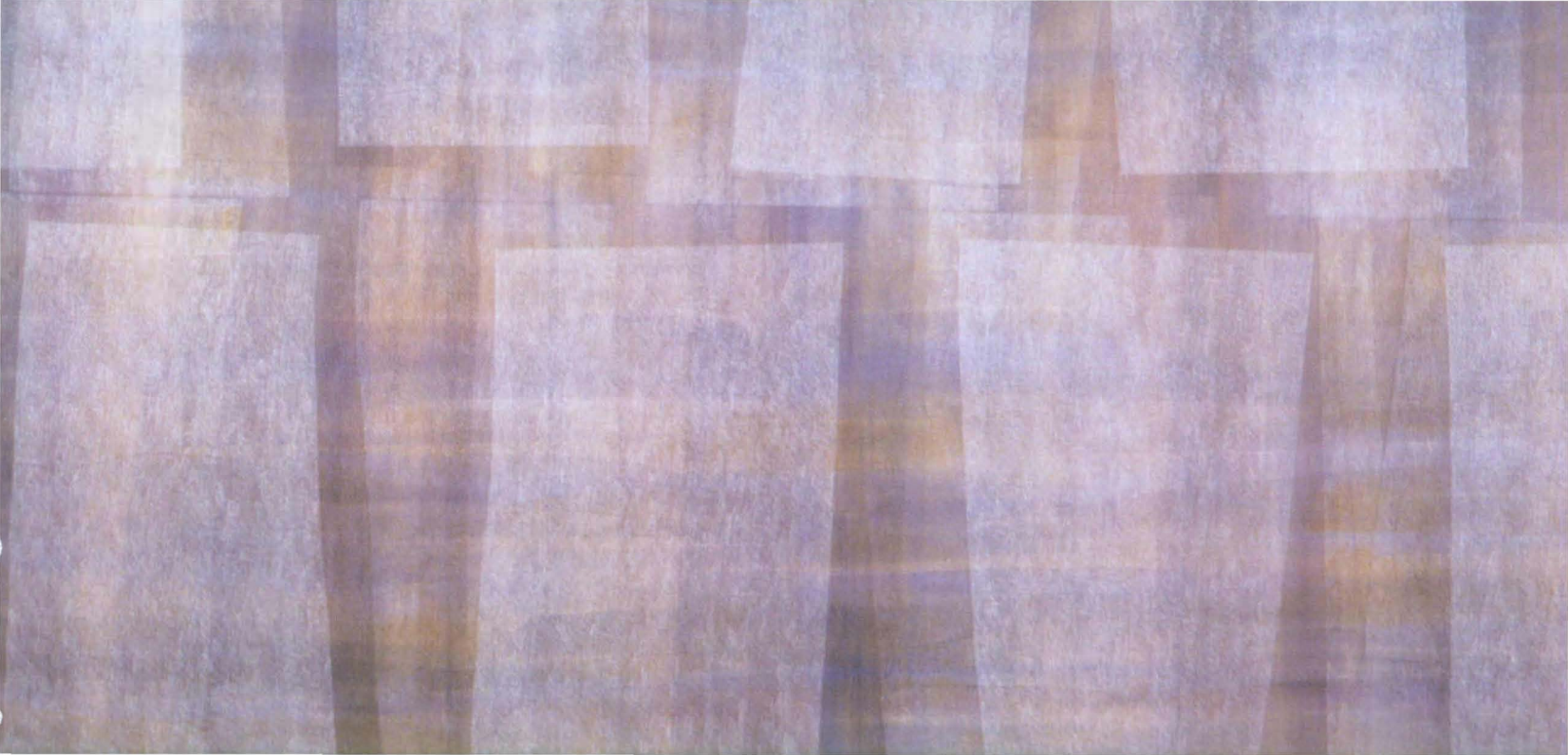
The artist gratefully acknowledges the assistance of the Australian Government through the Australian Antarctic Division's Australian Antarctic Arts Fellowship.

Vanishing 2004
oil on canvas 12 panels each 30 x 40 cm
(detail) <

Convergence 2005
Convergence 2005
Convergence 2005
(detail) >
all works acrylic and gouache on canvas each 130 x 180 cm

courtesy the artist and
Christine Abrahams Gallery, Melbourne

the artist is represented by Christine Abrahams Gallery,
Melbourne and Helen Maxwell Gallery, Canberra.



david stephenson:
romantic projection (the indifference of nature)

The ice sheet and ice shelf extensions covering Antarctica are about 14 million square kilometres in area, double the size of Australia, with an average thickness of about two kilometres, reaching a maximum of four and a half kilometres. The ice has been generated over millions of years by falling snow slowly settling (paradoxically the precipitation level is so low that Antarctica is technically a desert). The weight of this ice is so

extreme that it has depressed a large proportion of the continent to below sea level, actually distorting the sphere of the earth to a pear-like form, flattened on the southern polar regions. Because of its cover of white ice the albedo of Antarctica is extremely high, with most of the sun's energy being reflected back into space. Every year Antarctica regenerates a cover of sea ice equal in size to the continent itself, effectively doubling the area of the ice, which contributes further to the lack of solar energy absorption. All these factors contribute to making Antarctica an enormous freezer, by far the coldest place on Earth, with a mean temperature at the South Pole of about -50 Celsius. Although Antarctic waters support a rich marine biota, and the small ice free coastal oases occupying a tiny fraction of the area of the continent permit a sparse ecosystem, as soon as one gets even a few kilometres inland on the ice sheet all signs of vascular plant and mammal life disappear entirely.

Standing at the edge of The Ice, facing the source, the Pole, one stares at a blue-white horizon which extends for thousands of kilometres, composed entirely of a single mineral, water, in a single state. All fluids (even those of the body) threaten to solidify. No pictures or description can prepare one for the total alien strangeness of the view, unlike anything one has ever encountered anywhere else before. Nature does not appear to be benevolently beautiful, or even awesomely sublime. Nature is simply totally indifferent.

(David Stephenson, statement for the exhibition *The Ice*, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, 1993)

The artist gratefully acknowledges the assistance of the Australian Antarctic Division and the University of Tasmania

The Ice series (1991-92)

Numbers 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10
Number 5 (detail) <
Number 4 (detail) >
type c colour photographs, each 56 x 71 cm

courtesy the artist,
Bett Gallery, Hobart and Julie Saul Gallery, New York

the artist is represented by Bett Gallery, Hobart
Christine Abrahams Gallery, Melbourne
Boutwell Draper Gallery, Sydney
and Julie Saul Gallery, New York

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